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NOTE ON WARD'S "PURE SOCIOLOGY." III.

NOTES I and II have dealt with earlier chapters of the book, which provoke inquiry of many sorts, but which do not contain the most important parts of the author's argument. When we reach Part II, "Genesis," we begin to deal with the substance of the author's thought. From this point so many questions are involved which lead into almost every department of knowledge, that fruitful discussion of it would require the co-operation of an army of specialists. This discussion must go on, and its results must in any event make the foundations of sociology more secure. Meanwhile it is in order to indicate the place which the book as a whole must occupy in the literature of sociology.

In the first place, Ward's system is the first considerable attempt by an original investigator of admitted competence equally in biology and in sociology, to generalize the cosmic process from its mechanical and organic beginnings to its most highly conscious manifestations in social order. Whether the system turns out to stand fire or not, it is a survey of the social process by a man who has found out through first-hand study that there is an underlying cosmic process. Social philosophers galore have taken this comprehensive fact on trust, and have used it faithfully. Here is a scholar whose outlook is that of a man who has interviewed the cosmic process for himself. The episode of human history necessarily falls into a different perspective in his view from that of a man to whom human affairs are all that is real, while the physical antecedents of society are virtually fable or rumor.

In the second place, Ward has given us a *system*, not disconnected dabs at social problems. Every competent reader of sociological literature must have remarked the fragmentary character of its most notable books. Thin sections, snapshots, detached incidents, special classes of phenomena, hypotheses to explain abstracted elements among social factors, make up their contents. Here comes a Gulliver among the Lilliputians and assembles the litter of social concepts into a replica of the world-order. Men may say in a hundred years or so that the work was crude. They are not likely to deny that it was monumental, nor that one of the rare minds of our time produced it.

In the third place, this system is in the spirit which may perhaps be set down as the chief merit of Herbert Spencer. He did more than

any man to spread the news that the world is not made up of instantaneous and separate creations, like so many bricks in the mold; but that everything is a link in a chain of perpetual becomings, and that we can find no end to the chain in either direction. Ward concentrates the same sort of interpretation upon generic changes from universal ether to and through society. The social reality has never been at the same time so specifically and so comprehensively expounded as the latest aspect of energies acting continuously, with no gaps in the causal series.

In the fourth place, Ward has elaborated concepts, from the most inclusive, like "genesis" and "telesis," to the most particular, all of which are inevitable categories for thinking the social process. There is plenty of room for difference of opinion both about the absolute and the comparative value of some of these categories, but there is no room for doubt that intelligence about the social process must involve familiar knowledge of these generalizations, and aptness to apply them in criticism of concrete situations. In many cases we shall have to use formulas contained in this book as the best available account of what is embraced under standard generalizations.

In the fifth place, the system is relatively compact. To be sure, the volume contains more than one excursus which perhaps might better have been relegated to an appendix. The main line of argument might thus have become more apparent. Considering, however, the well-known works that have occupied much more space, and yet have failed to cover the ground of general sociology, this volume, even if we reckon in the *Applied Sociology*, which we hope will soon follow, is an unusually successful combination of the condensed and the compendious.

If these propositions are true, it is superfluous to add that the volume is one of those which every professional sociologist must master. Not to be familiar with it will mean provincialism of a sort which no course of reading that I could name would certainly remove.

But in spite of the foregoing estimate, notwithstanding the debt which I personally acknowledge to Ward, and although I believe he will have a permanent and conspicuous place among the makers of sociology, I must submit that there is a serious issue between him and the majority of sociologists. Without presuming to speak for them, my own dissent from him may be expressed in the charge that he shifts the center of attention too far back into some region of pre-sociology. The more I read Ward, the more I am inclined to classify

him as a philosopher with sociological leanings, instead of a sociologist with philosophical attachments. This is, of course, in no sense a charge against the content of his system. It is an attempt to place that system with reference to the center of interest in sociology.

To my mind sociology focalizes upon the appraisal of factors in our present life. For sociology truth is important in proportion to its availability for application in real life. For instance, if we had a relatively complete sociology, it would interpret to us the human values involved in the Korean and Manchurian struggle at this moment. It would analyze the situation, not merely as a race-conflict, a diplomatic incident, a military, economic, political, or religious issue, an accidental collision of civilizations, or whatever; it would show just what is involved for the present and future of human welfare in general, and what line of action is accordingly expedient. Every really serious sociological problem is incidental to ability in the direction of deriving such guidance, whether about questions as minute as the midnight closing of Chicago saloons, or as big as opening all doors of world-commerce. I have not the slightest disposition to question the necessity of the most highly generalized concepts, as the setting of all concrete social situations. My argument is merely against excess of attention to the concepts, and defect of attention to the situations. My measure of the realness of a sociological method, therefore, is the length it can go toward satisfying the conditions of genuine interpretation. In order for sociology to be fruitful, it must conform to the same conditions that make any other science fruitful—*i. e.*, it must have a problem, or a set of problems, and must severely restrict itself to evidence that promises to throw light on the solutions.

Now, it seems to me that Ward's method, judged by the restricted standards of sociology, rather than the larger measure of general philosophy, in spirit, if not in form, antagonizes this condition. However we define sociology, in some shape or other its problem is the meaning of life. Ward's emphasis is such that his problem seems to me to be the organization of abstractions. Vital as such work is, it can hardly be rated high in the scale of distinctively sociological values. For sociology the degree of its value might be compared with the timeliness of working out refinements of Spencer's *First Principles*, when the business in hand is digging the Panama Canal. To the man whose interest is in philosophizing about physical causation in general those abstractions are profitable. To the man who is interested in causing something they would seem infinitely dilatory.

Society is not a logical arrangement of categories, any more than a railroad bridge is. The bridge is specific material devoted to the work of carrying a load. Society is real people helping and hindering each other in carrying many loads. Ward's impersonal rendering of society goes about as far toward interpreting real society as the study of geometry would toward explaining the Brooklyn Bridge. If he had included sections on the categories of time, space, number, and causation, he would hardly have stretched the boundaries of sociology more than he has done.

Another line of criticism is equally pertinent. By the very terms of the distinction between "pure" and "applied" sociology it was foreordained that the emphasis should be thrown as exclusively as possible upon the mere form of acts, while their content, and particularly that part of it which is made up of purpose, is reduced to the lowest minimum. The effect upon me is that in reading the book I seem to be dealing, not with society at all, but with the mechanism of a ghost-dance. That is, in so far as Ward succeeds in carrying out his abstraction "pure sociology," he unconsciously withdraws from the domain of sociology altogether, and writes the closing chapters of biology.¹ In saying this I am not arguing indirectly for the divorce of biological and sociological factors that nature has joined together. I simply claim that, if we may place the beginning of sociology anywhere, it must be at a point after conscious purposes have supplanted pack interests as the springs of action. The proportions of Ward's discussion that fall on the two sides of this boundary carry the center of operations entirely too far away from the essential interest of sociology.

Dr. Ward might reply that I am bound to wait for *Applied Sociology*, and to judge the two parts of his system together, before expressing an opinion. I admit the justice of the claim, and hope to be corrected by the system as a whole. At present I can judge only by the contents of *Pure Sociology*, and by the foreshadowings of *Applied Sociology* which are found in *Dynamic Sociology*. The impression which I receive is that Ward throws the center of gravity of sociology so far back in mechanics that he scarcely approaches the problem of interpreting society as a combination of purposes, and of endeavors to

¹This is quite a different thing from the assertion that De Greef makes of Spencer in almost the same terms. De Greef is objecting to Spencer's use of the biological analogy. My point is that by a process of exclusion Ward virtually limits himself in a large measure to phenomena that are more biological than psychical.

realize purposes. But this is the center of gravity of sociology, and everything that stops short of this must be regarded as mere settlement of preliminaries.

I envy the sociologist who can read *Pure Sociology* and not feel oppressed by the limitations of his knowledge. The book draws from many sources that are sealed to most of us. While we may be incompetent to discuss frequent details, we may wonder at the author's tremendous power of generalization and organization. He has been in a class by himself for twenty years, and in spite of all qualifications, this latest volume justifies the belief that his final rank will be among the first-rate thinkers of our period.

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